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RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN IMMEDIATE 9483  
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES IMMEDIATE 3285  
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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [IT](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY WANTS TO HOST OFF-CONTINENT AFRICOM HQ

REF: ROME 893

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Spogli for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. DASD Whelan, the Ambassador and DATT briefed the Italian PM's principle advisor and U/S Gianni Letta on DOD strategic thinking with respect to AFRICOM and our desire to establish Army and Navy service component commands (at Initial Operational Capability) in Italy by October 1, 2008. Letta responded positively to the USG's overall strategy, especially with regard to preventive planning. He immediately indicated that Italy would be the right choice for the eventual overall AFRICOM HQ. Whelan explained that the U.S. was still examining options for the "off continent" component of the overall AFRICOM HQ and was currently looking at European as well as U.S. locations. Letta said he would report back to PM Berlusconi and MOD La Russa on these discussions and reiterated Italy's desire to host the overall AFRICOM HQ. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) DASD Whelan began with an explanation of post 911 DOD strategic thinking on Africa. She noted that Africa was historically covered by three different commands and that a decision was made in 2006 to stand up a unified geographic command for Africa whose focus would be on preventative action as opposed to reactive action. Whelan explained the new command would focus on developing African capacity to provide security and praised Italian contributions to COESPU. However, AFRICOM will also have the capability to conduct military operations if directed to do so (e.g. humanitarian assistance and non-combatant evacuations.)

¶3. (C) Whelan explained that DOD was in the process of re-organizing U.S. forces in Europe in order to establish AFRICOM and its service components. The U.S. hoped to declare AFRICOM fully operational by October 1, 2008 and to declare the service component commands "initially" operational by October 1, 2008 and fully operational by October 1, 2009. For Italy, she explained that we are seeking to capitalize on SETAF's already extensive Africa experience by transforming them into the AFRICOM Army service component command HQ. The Navy service component command HQ will be located in Naples and "triple hatted" to include their EUCOM and NATO responsibilities. Whelan emphasized that the new AFRICOM service component commands will remain available to NATO for any future NATO operations in Africa, just as they were when they were under EUCOM.

¶4. (C) Letta said he appreciated our reasoning and logic and agreed that preventative planning is in everyone's best interest. He noted that the G8 often mentioned the importance of preventative planning and thanked the U.S. for approaching Africa with such serious attention. His first question was where the permanent HQs would be located. He emphasized that Italy would be extremely interested in

hosting it and noted that Italy makes the best sense for its geographic proximity to Africa, for the historically strong U.S./Italian bilateral relationship, and finally on the basis of the historically solid mil/mil relationship and basing arrangements. Whelan made clear that host-nation flexibility for stationed forces would be a key factor in the U.S. decision on where to locate the HQs. Letta responded that Italy has always demonstrated such flexibility, and will continue to be accommodating of U.S. stationed forces' operational requirements.

15. (C) Whelan explained that there were a number of European locations under consideration, as well as U.S. locations. Letta said he could understand if we pick the U.S., but hoped that if we choose Europe - we will choose Italy. Letta concluded by saying he would report back to PM and MOD.

16. (C) DASD Whelan has cleared this cable.  
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